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SUBJECT: FRANCE/DRC/RWANDA: FOREIGN MINISTER'S VISIT

REF: KIGALI 75

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt,
1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Rwanda and its troubled relations with France emerged as the key element of French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner's January 25-26 to the DRC and Rwanda, according to Laurent Chevallier, the MFA desk officer for both. Kouchner made a sincere, good-faith effort to display to Rwandans that the GOF wanted to normalize relations, although he was obliged to warn them that the French judiciary, and not the GOF, controlled the disposition of the warrants issued in connection with the 1994 genocide. The Rwandans, who generally respect Kouchner, appreciated his gesture but remained wary of the warrants and skeptical of Kouchner's claim that the GOF's powers were limited regarding the French judiciary. In the DRC, Kouchner lauded the signing of the Goma Accords, which the GOF considers a valuable advance but which should be accompanied by parallel movement with the FDLR (Forces Democratiques de la Liberation du Rwanda). END SUMMARY.

Rwanda

¶2. (C) Laurent Chevallier, MFA desk officer for the DRC and Rwanda, on January 31 briefed on FM Kouchner's January 25 and 26 visits to the DRC and Rwanda (reftel). Chevallier said that the most part of the visit took place in Kigali, where Kouchner wanted to make clear to President Kagame that France hoped that the two sides could normalize relations. Kouchner wanted to convey this message to Kagame personally, as the two had known each other over many years and liked and respected each other, Chevallier said.

¶3. (C) The obstacle remains, of course, the arrest warrants/indictments that resulted from then-anti-terrorism Judge Bruguiere's November 2006 report, which also suggested that Kagame be investigated for a possible role in the events leading to the 1994 genocide. Kouchner, as have other GOF officials, explained that the case was now in the judiciary's hands and that the GOF had little power to control the outcome of whatever the judiciary might do, including quashing the investigation or the warrants Bruguiere's report had generated. Chevallier said the Rwandans remained skeptical, arguing that there had been "political" involvement, if not tacit approval, for what Bruguiere did, considering that a French procureur (prosecutor), a member of the executive branch, had signed off on the report. Chevallier said that, technically, the Rwandans were correct in asserting "political" involvement. However, the procureur who signed the report was doing so in his professional functional and was not making a "political" act. The Rwandans, he said, remained unconvinced. Kouchner told them that neither side could undo the past (i.e., make Bruguiere's

report go away, or undo the procureur's signature). What both sides needed to do was move forward.

¶4. (C) Chevallier said that the Rwandans absorbed what Kouchner said but that they were not willing to move very far. "The ball is in their court. They know where we stand and they know our limits, as imposed by the judiciary. It's up to them to take advantage of our willingness to move forward," Chevallier commented.

¶5. (C) Break in relations or not, Chevallier said that the two sides were managing to communicate directly. He said that Kouchner had phoned Kagame several times, President Sarkozy had met, albeit not at length, with Kagame at the UNGA in September and then again at the EU-Africa Summit in Lisbon. France had sent an A/S-level delegation to Kigali as well. He affirmed the presence reported reftel, para 4, of a Rwandan delegation to France, and said that this was another step in the series of contacts between the two sides since the rupture of relations in November 2006. Chevallier indicated that such contacts were becoming routine and that when the two sides really had something to discuss, they could do so without friction. He noted, however, that these irregular contacts did not constitute a type of "de facto" normalization. Full normalization would take time, he said, and much would depend on how Rwanda responded to French overtures and succeeded in overcoming reservations about the warrants and France's judiciary.

¶6. (C) Chevallier commented briefly on Kouchner's public statement that France had committed "errors" with respect to the 1994 genocide, although Kouchner did so without specifying what those "errors" were or who committed them. Chevallier said that Kouchner meant that France, along with many others, had misjudged over a period of years the forces at work in Rwanda that were eventually responsible for the genocide. Chevallier said it was unfair to criticize Kouchner for not being more specific about who did what -- "The whole world shared in the responsibility of what happened in Rwanda, or in not responding fast enough to it. It is this sense of shared responsibility in a tragic event that Kouchner was talking about when he made his remarks," Chevallier said.

DRC

¶7. (C) Chevallier said that Kouchner's stop in the DRC before going to Rwanda was much more straightforward. He went in order to express France's continuing interest in the DRC ("for us, it is THE strategic country in that part of Africa") and in strengthening relations. He also wanted to see the situation for himself in eastern DRC, which he was able to do (with an eye on the Rwandan aspect as well), both with respect to today's situation but also concerning the still-present effects of the 1994 genocide.

¶8. (C) Kouchner's timing was good, arriving in the DRC just after the signing of the Goma Accords, for which he offered firm French support during his visit. Chevallier said that there was some criticism of the Accords, some of it valid, but that they were a step in the right direction, even if they were not a universal solution to the conflicts in the region. Chevallier noted that the FDLR problem continued, and he said that having the Goma Accords was good but it would be most helpful to see movement as well on FDLR-related problems, in parallel with the Goma Accords.

¶9. (U) Septel reports on Kouchner's post-Rwanda January 27 stop in Burkina Faso.

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